

LEADING GRACE

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**A LETTER FROM THE
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**WHAT'S THE
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**ARE YOU STRAIGHTFORWARD
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There is a military term that speaks of strength: Allied Forces. It tells the world that one country is not going alone, but that it has the support of others. Whether it is an army or an individual, we are weaker if we try and succeed on our own. King Solomon wisely wrote, "Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor" (Eccl. 4:9). Jesus did not send His disciples out alone, but in pairs knowing that they would have challenges to face (Mark 6:7-13). The Apostle Paul did not go on his missionary journeys alone. The church is called to have a plurality of elders. The old saying is true, "There is no "I" in "Team." The fact remains true: the Lord made us to do ministry together.

When it comes to supporting, defending, articulating, clarifying, and proclaiming the gospel in its original pure form, we as the Free Grace Alliance believe it is better to do this together rather than alone. That is why our mission is "to connect, encourage, and equip the body of Christ to advance the grace message throughout the world." Therefore, the leadership of our alliance continues to be in prayerful discussion around how we can unite us all to be stronger together. We feel there are three broad branches of our alliance: The education branch, the missions branch, and the church branch. The question is, "How can we unite these three branches in the Lord's service to be allied forces for the sake of the gospel?"

To help fulfill our mission and to build this alliance, we are excited to announce the launching of this brand-new electronic magazine "Leading Grace" This quarterly publication will have articles from all three branches of the Free Grace Alliance to keep us all informed on what is happening around the globe, to keep us sharp in our quest to articulate and proclaim the purity of the gospel, and to inspire us to press on together for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Free Grace Alliance covenant says that we will "work together graciously and enthusiastically to advance this Gospel of Grace, and to communicate with a positive and gracious tone toward all others, both inside and outside the Free Grace Alliance." That will be the heartbeat of "Leading Grace Magazine." I am excited to announce this new tool that is made available for all to read and pass along in order to spread the gospel of God's grace to as many people as we can. I hope all of you will benefit from its content.

Serving Christ with You – Joyfully,



Jeremy Vance
President of the Free Grace Alliance

WE AFFIRM THE FOLLOWING:

The Grace of God in justification is an unconditional free gift.

The sole means of receiving the free gift of eternal life is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died on the cross as our substitute, fully satisfying the requirement for our justification, and was raised bodily from the dead.

Faith is a personal response, apart from our works, whereby we are persuaded that the finished work of Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection, has delivered us from condemnation and guaranteed our eternal life.

Justification is the act of God to declare us righteous when we believe in Jesus Christ alone.

Assurance of justification is the birthright of every believer from the moment of faith in Jesus Christ, and is founded upon the testimony of God in His written Word.

Spiritual growth, which is distinct from justification, is God's expectation for every believer; this growth, however, is not necessarily manifested uniformly in every believer.

The Gospel of Grace should always be presented with such clarity and simplicity that no impression is left that justification requires any step, response, or action in addition to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Covenant

In agreement with these affirmations, we covenant to work together graciously and enthusiastically to advance this Gospel of Grace, and to communicate with a positive and gracious tone toward all others, both inside and outside the Free Grace Alliance.



THE GOSPEL AND THE GRAND CANYON

The gospel and the Grand Canyon have something in common. What is missing is what makes them so amazing. Water dug out an unfathomable amount of dirt and rock from the Grand Canyon and left a hole so big it's hard to even wrap your mind around it while looking at it. The gospel is amazing because God took out from it anything at all that we could contribute.

A filled-in Grand Canyon would look just like a thousand other places and a filled-in gospel would look just like a thousand other religions.

If you filled either one in with anything at all, it would lose its beauty.



WE ESTABLISH THE LAW THROUGH FAITH

BY GRANT HAWLEY

If one thing stands out about the Apostle Paul's letters, it's that he wants his readers to know about their freedom in Christ. "You are not under law, but under grace" (Rom 6:14b), "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal 5:1), and "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law" (Gal 5:18) are just a few of Paul's many strong statements about the Christian's freedom.

If that's true, what does Paul mean when he writes, "Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law." in Romans 3:31? When out of context, this statement does seem to suggest something that goes against all of Paul's many statements about the Christian's freedom. How can Christ be the end of the law (Rom 10:4) and it also be true that we also "establish the law" through faith in Him?

Let's look at the context. Just before this section of text (Rom 3:21-31), we have a discussion about how the Old Testament shows that no one can be justified by the works of the law because the OT itself insists that everyone is guilty (3:9-20). Following our passage in Rom 3:21-31, we have chapter 4, which is a discussion about how the Old Testament shows that justification is by faith apart from works. Paul uses Abraham and David as illustrations of this principle.

Besides looking at a verse in context, it can often be helpful to recognize the literary structure of the passage we're studying. Paul used an interesting structure called "chiasm" when he wrote Romans 3:21 to 3:31. When we map it out, the passage looks like this

A. BUT NOW APART FROM THE LAW THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD HAS BEEN MANIFESTED, BEING WITNESSED BY THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS,
B. EVEN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST FOR ALL THOSE WHO BELIEVE; FOR THERE IS NO DISTINCTION;
C. FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD,
D. BEING JUSTIFIED AS A GIFT BY HIS GRACE THROUGH THE REDEMPTION WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS;
E. WHOM GOD DISPLAYED PUBLICLY AS A PROPITIATION IN HIS BLOOD THROUGH FAITH.
F. THIS WAS TO DEMONSTRATE HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, BECAUSE IN THE FORBEARANCE OF GOD HE PASSED OVER THE SINS PREVIOUSLY COMMITTED;
F'. FOR THE DEMONSTRATION, I SAY, OF HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS AT THE PRESENT TIME,
E'. SO THAT HE WOULD BE JUST AND THE JUSTIFIER OF THE ONE WHO HAS FAITH IN JESUS.
D'. WHERE THEN IS BOASTING? IT IS EXCLUDED. BY WHAT KIND OF LAW? OF WORKS? NO, BUT BY A LAW OF FAITH.
C'. FOR WE MAINTAIN THAT A MAN IS JUSTIFIED BY FAITH APART FROM WORKS OF THE LAW.
B'. OR IS GOD THE GOD OF JEWS ONLY? IS HE NOT THE GOD OF GENTILES ALSO? YES, OF GENTILES ALSO, SINCE INDEED GOD WHO WILL JUSTIFY THE CIRCUMCISED BY FAITH AND THE UNCIRCUMCISED THROUGH FAITH IS ONE.
A'. DO WE THEN NULLIFY THE LAW THROUGH FAITH? MAY IT NEVER BE! ON THE CONTRARY, WE ESTABLISH THE LAW.

Here, the first and last line (A and A') are parallel, so are B and B', C and C', etc. This helps us tremendously with our question. Verse 31, "Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law" parallels verse 21, "But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets." This shows us that Paul is using the term "the Law" to refer to the Old Testament Scripture, "the Law and the Prophets," not specifically the requirements of the Law of Moses. When Paul writes, "On the contrary, we establish the Law," what he means is that righteousness by faith apart from the works of the Law is exactly what the Old Testament teaches.

This is also what we would expect from the context, since Paul established through the Old Testament that no one can be justified by the law in 3:9-20 and used illustrations from the great patriarchs Abraham and David to show that righteousness is by grace through faith in chapter 4. The validity of the Old Testament is upheld by teaching justification by grace through faith. So, Paul doesn't contradict himself. The Christian really is free from the Law and righteousness is and always has been by grace through faith apart from the works of the Law. The Old Testament itself establishes this fact.

**BY HOLDING FAST
TO OUR FREEDOM FROM THE LAW
THAT CHRIST PURCHASED
FOR US WITH HIS OWN BLOOD,
WE HONOR THE LAW.**

WHADDU I LOVE ABOUT THE GOSPEL??

AN INTERVIEW WITH JON MCCRAY OF YOUTUBE'S
Whaddo You Meme??



BRINGING A
FREE GRACE
MESSAGE TO
MORE THAN 200K
YOUTUBE SUBSCRIBERS

RECENTLY, WE HAD THE PLEASURE OF SITTING DOWN WITH JON MCCRAY OF YOUTUBE'S WHADDU YOU MEME?? TO ASK HIM A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT HIS LIFE AND MINISTRY. THIS IS THE TRANSCRIPT OF OUR CONVERSATION.

HELP OUR READERS GET TO KNOW YOU BY TELLING US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF.

I run the YouTube channel called Whaddo You Meme?? And I've been engaged in apologetics specifically for a while now, for maybe 5-10 years. I just have a passion for Free Grace Theology. I think that it's biblical and it makes sense, so it's something I'm passionate about and interested in. Also because it has applications for everyday life and for everyday situations.

Specifically, when doing videos for my channel, I'm always talking about how the gospel relates to things that are going on in culture and even things that we can take from it for our everyday lives, and specifically what's very helpful with that is understanding grace in its fullness and the implications that has for the things that we see in culture and that we experience in our daily lives.

TELL ME ABOUT WHEN YOU FIRST CAME TO FAITH IN CHRIST

I was first introduced to the church when I was fifteen, I didn't grow up in a church or anything like that, and I was first introduced to this church that was charismatic and also very legalistic. And because of that, me and my twin brother, we stayed there for about maybe six months to a year and then I just wanted nothing to do with church after that. He kept going. In college, I took a philosophy of religion class and I started to think more critically about God's existence, and determining what I believed, because at this point, I was more agnostic. Sometimes I believed more than others, and at other times, I believed less. After that, I got into apologetics and I believed in God's existence and eventually came to believe in the historical evidence of the resurrection and that convinced me and brought me to faith.

And it was sometime after that, I had never really thought too deeply about the complexities of trying to overlap works with faith. So, there was a time when I was teaching at a Reasonable Faith chapter here in Denver, and we had a guy come in who was Church of Christ and he was very

bent on works. He started challenging everybody about the gospel—what the gospel meant—and if we believed that, for example, if somebody can live like Hitler and go to heaven, and so everybody's instinct was to say, 'no.' But at that point, I didn't really know exactly where to kind of punt some of these works, because I wanted to say, 'no' out of instinct, but at the same time, I understood grace to be a free gift.

And so, after wrestling with that for about a year, me and my friend started to debate about it. And he had the Free Grace position, and I held a position that wanted to hold on to works in some way, but then we started debating it for about a year and we went through all of these different passages, and in the end I started to believe that Free Grace was the only thing that made sense of the Bible. And a lot of the Scriptures that people took in order to try to say that works are a requirement of salvation in some sense, I felt like most of their takes on these Scriptures weren't as strong exegetically as the Free Grace understanding of the passages, or just a simple, basic understanding of the passages.

"...IN THE END I STARTED TO BELIEVE THAT FREE GRACE WAS THE ONLY THING THAT MADE SENSE OF THE BIBLE"

WE HAVE A MUTUAL FRIEND IN CHARLIE BING. HOW DID YOU GET TO KNOW HIM?

Just over email. What's interesting is as I was researching specifically how to understand First John, and this was before I even knew there was a term for 'Free Grace,' by the way, and my friend whom I debated with, he didn't know the term either. It's a long story, but he heard Bob Wilkin speak years ago, and he thought about it over the years, and so he became Free Grace but he wasn't aware

McCray. WHADDU I LOVE ABOUT THE GOSPEL?? CTD.

...there was a term for it. And so, I was trying to Google different understandings of First John, and I came across Charlie Bing's explanations and I felt like it was a breath of fresh air, because I'm like, 'Man, other people believe this, too.' And so, after that, I signed up to his blog and then I sent him an email once about a question I had regarding a passage in First Corinthians, and so that's how we started email communication, and then I invited him to one of my Zoom hangouts for supporters, and so he came and spoke about grace once.

WHAT'S YOUR YOUTUBE CHANNEL ABOUT?

Yeah, so my YouTube channel is trying to explain faith and the gospel, and how they overlap from a Millennial's perspective. So, I try to take into consideration how Millennials think and view the world, and I try to make the gospel more clear according to the worldview that they already hold. And one way I do that is always by, of course, talking about Free Grace in some way, because that is the gospel.

WHAT DIFFERENCES ARE THERE BETWEEN HOW NON-MILLENNIALS AND MILLENNIALS THINK?

So, Millennials... I guess all generations to some degree, but Millennials in particular, they tend to believe things based on certain assumptions, so a lot of their views come from certain assumptions they already have, for example, the idea that who I am comes from how I feel inside, and so a lot of their beliefs come from that but a lot of times, they don't even realize it because these things are so ingrained in our culture today that it's just common sense, so like the idea you shouldn't force your religion onto other people is just something people believe and it's just so axiomatic that they haven't thought about it but it's just true because it's common sense. . And so there's a lot of these little beliefs that I think really get in the way of Millennials understanding the gospel and I think it's not helped by the language that a lot of people use, like the street preachers and those type where they're just calling them 'sinners' and stuff,

and what they mean when they say, 'sinner' is probably different than what the Millennials are hearing when they're called a sinner. And so that's a big problem, because in order for them to understand the gospel, they have to understand the problem in the first place.

WHAT'S ONE THING HAVING A SUCCESSFUL YOUTUBE CHANNEL DID THAT YOU DIDN'T EXPECT?

I guess what I appreciate about it is the ability to get out the gospel to more people. I mean, especially when it comes to Free Grace. People's natural inclination is to include works into the gospel, so we don't find very many people who teach the gospel in a way that's clear. As soon as people add works to the gospel, it gets very muddy and confusing, and so a benefit of having a somewhat decent sized YouTube channel is that I can reach people with the true gospel message, and it's not going to be confusing like it is when people include works into it.

DO YOU THINK A FREE GRACE GOSPEL IS MORE APPEALING TO MILLENNIALS THAN YOUR TYPICAL. WORKS MUDDIED GOSPEL?

Yes and no. I'd say yes in the sense that millennials are looking to be accepted in their authentic selves, but I'd say no in the sense that we all have a natural tendency toward works because it plays into our identity and our ego and our values and all those things, because we think that we're valuable because we do XYZ. But with the Free Grace gospel, you can't use any of that because as Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-9, it's by grace though faith, it's not of works, you know what I mean, so you can't brag about those works. And so that's a thing that I think is offensive to everybody all around. We all want to attach our identity to works in some way in order to give ourselves validation. And then we like to look down on other people who aren't doing those works so that way we can feel more assured about our position with God. But when it comes to the Free Grace gospel, it shaves that away, so I think that can be both comforting and offensive to everybody.

HOW DO YOU NAVIGATE THAT CHALLENGE?

It really depends on who I'm talking to, because I think that different types of people take different things to be evidence and so you want to start and meet them where they're at like Jesus met us where we were at. Meet them where they're at and then work from there to help get them to where they can understand that grace is what they need and

works are not the solution. And so, it looks different with each person I'm talking to, because I'm talking to different people. But broadly speaking, there's three main categories that a friend of mine and I have noticed when it comes to people, and we've been working on a model around this, but the first category is people who take things to be evidence if it comes from an authority or tradition, or something along those lines. The second would be people who take things to be evidence if they come from systems, like science and logic and those sorts of things. And the third category is people who take things to be evidence that come from their internal feelings or personal experiences. And so, knowing where these people are helps to be able to know where to start. And it's interesting that all three of these groups think that it's obvious that their way is the right way to give the gospel, and they all can't stand each other because their views are mutually exclusive to them and the way that they use it. So that's just a long way to talk about how different people are and I take that into account and I also take into account where people get their identity, and then try to show them that it'd be better to get that value and identity in Christ and what He's done for us, rather than what we try to do for him.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE FROM THE FREE GRACE MOVEMENT IN THE COMING YEARS?

I'd like to see more development at being persuasive. I think that sometimes we do have some pretty persuasive points, but sometimes I find myself thinking the points aren't as persuasive, so I'd like to see more of an emphasis on saying, 'How can we be persuasive with this message to people, given where they're currently at.' And we can be more careful with our words, because when we communicate, we want people to understand the message that we're trying to get them to receive. And so, if they don't understand some of the language that we're using, then they're not going to understand the message that we're trying to give them. And so, knowing that words don't exist in a vacuum, we have to understand the context and understand the way that the people that we want to hear what we're saying are going to receive it.

IF YOU COULD BE REMEMBERED FOR ONE THING. WHAT WOULD IT BE?

I don't necessarily care for people to remember me and what I've done, but instead, I want when people think of me, for them to think about the gospel and how critical it is to understanding everything else and also the beauty that comes from understanding the true gospel.

WHERE CAN OUR READERS FIND YOU ONLINE?

You can just type in 'Whaddo You Meme?' and find me on most of the social media platforms.

"AS SOON AS PEOPLE
ADD WORKS TO
THE GOSPEL. IT
GETS VERY MUDDY
AND CONFUSING"

**DID YOU KNOW FGA HAS A
PODCAST? YOU CAN FIND US BY
SEARCHING "LEADING GRACE FREE
GRACE ALLIANCE" ON SPOTIFY, APPLE
PODCASTS, OR YOUR FAVORITE
PODCAST AGGREGATOR.**

*Leading
Grace*

A Podcast of the
**FREE GRACE
ALLIANCE**

When Jesus said, “the one who has endured to the end will be saved” (Matt 10:22; 24:13), what did He mean? Endurance to the end is a work of faithfulness. I always thought salvation was by faith alone, and not by means of a life of faithful works.

This passage raises two questions: (1) What did Jesus mean by “the end;” and (2) What did Jesus mean by “salvation?”

Regarding “the end,” many understand this to be the end of terrors facing the disciples during the tribulation, the inter-advent period or, possibly, to the end of the age. While that is possible and probably correct, it is likely that it also refers to enduring “as long as it takes.” In other words, it speaks of endurance in faithfulness to the end of one’s life.

The key word is “endure.” It refers to steadfast faith in God. Elsewhere in Matthew, the Lord instructs His disciples that they can “save [their] lives” (i.e., Greek, “souls”) by means of taking up one’s cross and following Him (Matt 16:25-26). Obviously, salvation in that passage does not refer to final deliverance from damnation. It is a positive reward for a life well-lived. It means to find a rich life now by putting Christ first, practicing self-denial, taking up our cross and following Christ, so that we will be favorably recompensed at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Jesus is telling his saved disciples how they can be saved!

Elsewhere Paul tells Timothy, “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” (1 Tim 4:16, ESV). Here then, are saved people in need of salvation! The salvation in view in these passages clearly refers to finding meaning in life through endurance in faithfulness to Christ unto the end.

Consider the life of a young teenager named Billie Kay Bothwell, a 16-year-old high school student who was admired by both Christians and non-Christians alike.

Not only had she believed, she had given her life to Christ and had allowed Christ to be formed in her life to the extent that, for her 16 years, she demonstrated a deep spiritual maturity.

One day, she was given the following assignment in her English literature class: “State how you would spend your time if you knew this would be the last week of your life.” Her essay reads as follows:

“Today I live. I week from today I die. If a situation such as this came to me I should probably weep. As soon as I realize there are many things to be done, would try to regain my composure. The first day of my suddenly shortened life, I would use to see all of my loved ones and assure them I loved them all very much.

On the evening of my first day I would ask God, in the solace of my room to give me strength to bear the rest of my precious days, and give me His hand, so that I could walk with Him.

On the second day I would awaken early, in order to see the rising sun, which I had so often cast aside to gain a few more moments of coveted sleep. I would continue throughout the day to visit family and friends, telling each one, “I love you. Thank you for the part you’ve played in my life.”

On the third day I’d travel alone into the woods, allowing God’s goodness and creation to surround me. I would see, undoubtedly, for the first time many things I had not taken the time to notice before.

On the fourth day, I would prepare my will; all sentimental things I possess I would leave to my family and friends.

I would spend the rest of the day with my mother. We have always been very close, and I would want to especially assure her of my deep gratitude for her tremendous impact on my life.

On Friday, the fifth day, my life almost ended, I would spend the time with my pastor, speaking with him of my relationship with Christ, and seeking advice my final hours. I would spend the rest of the day visiting those who are ill, silently being thankful that I know no pain, and yet I know my destiny.

On Saturday I would spend my time with a special friend who is going through a difficult time with her broken family and seek to comfort her. I would be at peace now, knowing that because of Christ I was soon going to spend an eternity in heaven. I would spend the rest of the day with my treasured grandparents and elderly friends, seeking their wisdom and sharing my love. Saturday night I would spend awake in prayer, knowing that God was by my side.

Upon wakening Sunday morning, I would make all my last preparations, and then taking my Bible, I would go to church to spend my last hours in worship and praise, seeking to die gracefully and with the hope that my life had influence upon others for His glorious name. The last hour would not be spent in agony, but the perfect harmony of my relationship with Jesus Christ.”

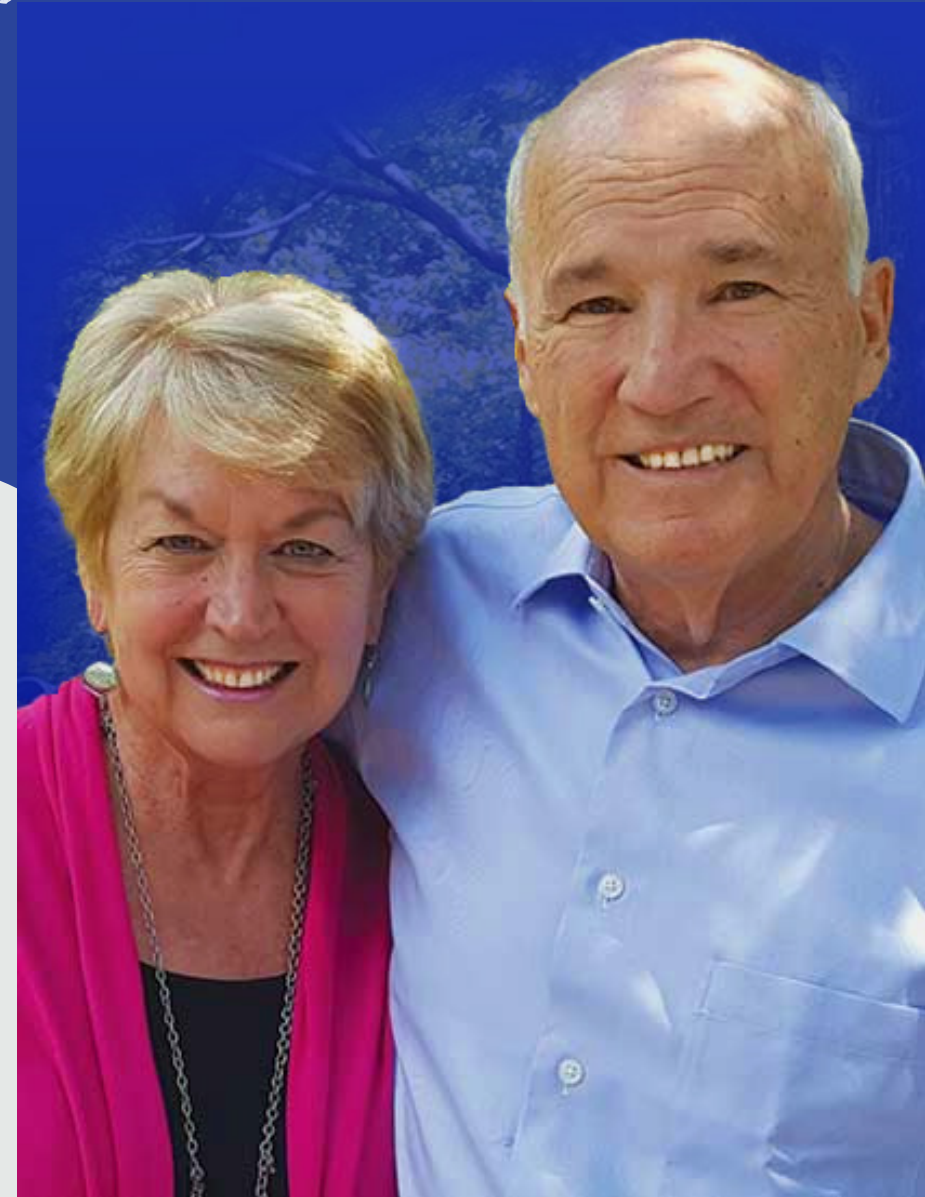
One week almost to the day after she handed in this essay, Kay Bothwell was ushered into eternity when she was killed in an automobile accident just outside her home in Marion, Indiana.

Christ can come at any moment, with no signs, like a thief in the night (1 Thess 5:2). This heightens the urgency to endure to the end so we can be “saved.” It makes a tremendous difference in the outlook of our Christian faith and the urgency of endurance so that we will be fully prepared for His return. That, according to Jesus, is how we can be saved from a wasted life.

How can we be prepared? Decide not to put off until later what we know we need to do now. Let us set ourselves aside and focus on living out Christ’s way of life. If we endure to the end of our lives, at the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10) we will hear the King say, “Well done.” (Matt 25:21). That is, if we endure to the end, we will be “saved.”

Dr. Dillow is the author of several books including *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Destiny of Man*; *The Pre-Flood Vapor Canopy*, *Speaking in Tongues*, *Solomon on Sex*, and with his wife Linda and Dr. Pete and Lorraine Pintus' *Intimacy Ignited*.

The Dillows live in Monument, Colorado.



THOSE WHO ENDURE TO THE END WILL BE SAVED
By Joseph Dillow



W
HAT'S

THE
CONNECTION?

BY
JEREMY
MIKKELSEN

BETWEEN

**FALLING AWAY
FROM THE
LIVING GOD**

&

**JESUS IS
BETTER THAN
MOSES**

When you first read “He [Jesus] has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses“ (Hebrews 3:3 NASB & throughout) you might be thinking, “isn’t that obvious?” When we find ourselves asking such a question, it is a good sign that there is something deeper we need to understand. Especially, when it’s in the immediate context of a warning passage like, “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. (Heb 3:12)”

The comparison of Jesus and Moses is the foundation of a logical argument the author is making that leads up to the warning, but to really understand the argument you have to dig back into the Old Testament. Remember, the book of Hebrews is written to Hebrew (Jewish) believers who would know their Old Testament well.

You might notice that Hebrews 3:7-11 is a reference to Psalm 95:7-11, which is attributed to no less than the Holy Spirit, who was working through king David as he wrote this Psalm:

	Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, “TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED ME BY TESTING ME, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS. “THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, ‘THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS’; AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, ‘THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.’” (Heb 3:7-11)	TODAY, IF YOU WOULD HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS AT MERIBAH, AS IN THE DAY OF MASSAH IN THE WILDERNESS, “WHEN YOUR FATHERS TESTED ME, THEY TRIED ME, THOUGH THEY HAD SEEN MY WORK. “FOR FORTY YEARS I LOATHED THAT GENERATION, AND SAID THEY ARE A PEOPLE WHO ERR IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DO NOT KNOW MY WAYS. “THEREFORE I SWORE IN MY ANGER, TRULY THEY SHALL NOT ENTER INTO MY REST.” (Psalm 95:7-11)
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Side by side you can see that the reference is almost a word-for-word quotation of Psalm 95. Note how the place names have been replaced with the briefest description of their historical significance. What exactly happened during the Exodus? This is a key question we have to answer if we are to understand this warning in Hebrews. The Psalm is helping us understand the historical happenings of the nation under the leadership of Moses. Some of the key events are described in Exodus 17, Numbers 13-14, and Numbers 20. Here is how Arnold Fruchtenbaum explains:

The background to this section is Numbers 13–14: the sin of Kadesh-Barnea, which was a crucial turning point in the history of Israel in the Wilderness. The Israelites had finished one year of journeying in the Wilderness, a great portion of the Mosaic Law had been given, and the Tabernacle had been built. They were now at the oasis of Kadesh-Barnea located on the border of the Promised Land. Before the conquest could begin in earnest, Moses sent out twelve spies to survey the territory. When they returned forty days later, the twelve men gave a report. Two of them, Joshua and Caleb, declared that with God Israel could take the Land. The other ten claimed that, due to the numerical superiority and the military strength of the Canaanites, it would be impossible to conquer the Land. The masses of the people decided to follow the majority vote. There was widespread revolt against God and Moses, and the Israelites came close to the point of killing Moses and Aaron until God intervened. This was a major, crucial turning point. (*The Messianic Jewish Epistles: Hebrews, James, First Peter, Second Peter, Jude*)

The nation had arrived at the edge of the Promised Land. They had a major faith decision to make– to trust God and take the Promised Land or to not trust God. Unfortunately for them, they choose not to follow Moses, Aaron, and God by faith; instead, they wanted to go back to slavery. You have to read their response:

All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?” So they said to one another, “Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt.” (Num 14:2-4)

Seeing the difficulties and without faith, they want to go back to Egypt!? How could they be so foolish, to see God provide, having walked across the sea on dry land, to eat mana, to see the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night and not have faith?

Guess what? It was happening again! You see, Jesus was better than Moses. He had healed the blind, raised the dead. He had died and on the third day was raised back to life. But the Jewish Christians were being persecuted for their faith and were tempted or actually giving up on Jesus and going back to practice temple sacrifices and Judaism. It was the same class of mistake as Kadesh.

This is why Hebrews has strong warnings. However, there is much confusion over what the consequences are, and what the applications are for us. Again, the answer is found by studying the rest of the event back in Numbers 14.

After the people say they want to go back to Egypt, Joshua stands to speak.

Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, “The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us—a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.” (Num 14:6-9)

God’s got this! We can totally do it! Don’t give up now! Exactly what you would expect of a solid faith leader like Joshua. So, Israel responds by faith, right? Well, not exactly.

But all the congregation said to stone them with stones. (Num 14:10a)

That is what you call rebellion. But more than just rebellion against Moses and Joshua, this is rebellion against God. Do you know what happens when people rebel against faith leaders who are walking by faith and obeying the literal voice of the living God?

Then the glory of the Lord appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel. (Num 14:10b)

God shows up. Don’t sweat the people holding stones! So, what did God have to say?

The Lord said to Moses, “How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst? I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they.” (Num 14:11-12)

"THAT'S WHAT YOU CALL REBELLION"

Gulp. Is this what the warning in Hebrews is getting at? Before you conclude so, keep reading about what Moses does, and ask yourself if Jesus is better, what would He do?

But Moses said to the Lord, “Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for by Your strength You brought up this people from their midst, and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, O Lord, are in the midst of this people, for You, O Lord, are seen eye to eye, while Your cloud stands over them; and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if You slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of Your fame will say, ‘Because the Lord could not bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, therefore He slaughtered them in the wilderness.’ But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared, ‘The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.’ Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.” (Num 14:13-19)

Moses prayed for their forgiveness. Would God forgive? If so, did that mean all was good and there were no consequences?

The text is explicit:

So the Lord said, “I have pardoned them according to your word; but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord. Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. (Num 14:20-23)

They were forgiven. God said it. We will see them in heaven. But they will have no part of God’s mission on earth to see “all the earth filled with the glory of the Lord”. They will not enter the Promised Land. They will not enter the “rest.” They lost their inheritance of the “land.”

So back to Hebrews. You know, that hard warning passage.

Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “To-day,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end (Heb 3:12-14)

In the context of Psalm 95, which brought us to Numbers 14, we have a tangible example of what it means to have an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. It means to see God at work, to see the miracles, and then to not walk by faith. These Hebrew Christians were in danger of doing the same thing, by rejecting Jesus and the teaching of the Apostles even though they had seen the miracles. So the author instructs them to encourage each other day after day, so that no one is hardened by sin. We become partakers – “kingdom business partners” of Christ if we hold fast. If we don’t hold fast, just like the Exodus generation didn’t, we are not partners, and we get to have no part in seeing “all the earth filled with the glory of the Lord.”

Ok, now that we understand the passage in its context, let’s talk theology for a moment. There are a few different ways that this warning is traditionally interpreted. The implications are huge.

Many would say if a person “falls away from the living God” it is actually evidence that they were never saved in the first place. That is one way to keep it logical, but it doesn’t match this passage. The passage addresses the original audience as “brethren” which implies that they were in the family of faith– sons and daughters of God.

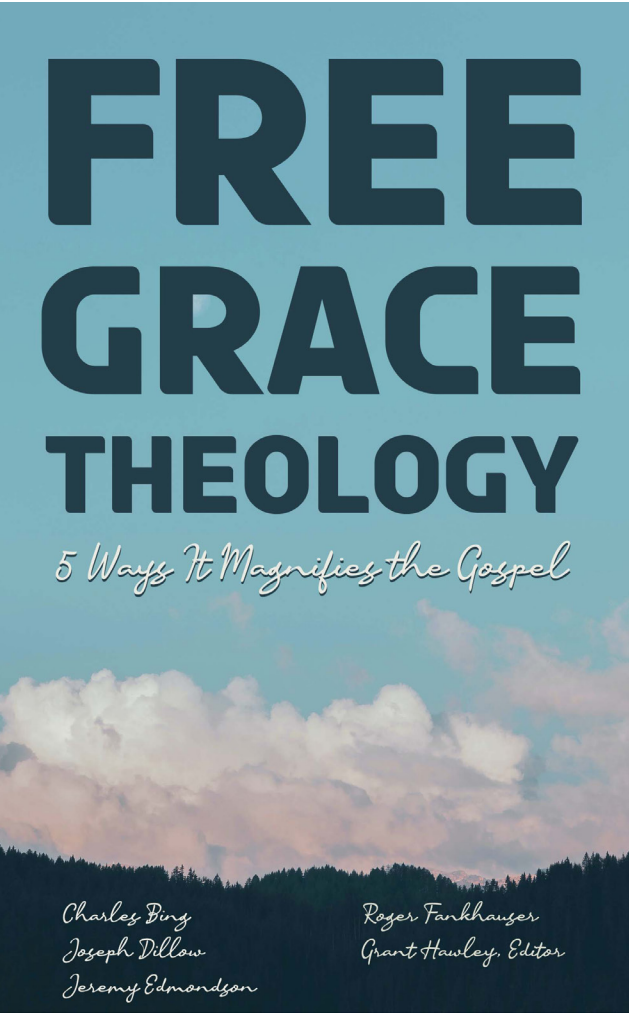
On the other hand, many would suggest that falling away could mean that the audience could even be losing their justification. However, that perspective implies that Jesus’s petition on our behalf was less effectual than Moses—which is the opposite of the context.

THE FREE GRACE INTERPRETATION I HAVE SHARED WITH YOU OF THIS WARNING IS THAT “FALLING AWAY” RESULTS IN LOSING OUT ON THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE A “PARTNER” WITH CHRIST AND MISSING OUT ON SEEING GOD WORK THROUGH US AS WE WALK BY FAITH. IT ISN’T A SALVATION ISSUE. IT IS A DISCIPLESHIP/ SANCTIFICATION ISSUE. THIS INTERPRETATION IS BASED ON THE TEXT, UNDERSTOOD BY THE CONTEXT, AND IS LOGICALLY NON-CONTRADICTORY WITH ITSELF AND THE SCRIPTURES. THAT IS GOOD THEOLOGY.

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It is one thing to say, “I preach the gospel;” it is another thing if indeed you preach the same gospel that the church (the body of Christ) has been tasked to preach. Today, different gospel messages have crept into the church. Here are some of them:

- #1. “Believe in Christ but works will show if you really believed!”
- #2. “You cannot do this or that and still be saved!”
- #3. “Repent of your sins and you shall be saved!”

**"I AM NOT
ASHAMED OF
THE GOSPEL"**

These and many more distorted gospels have become the content in many pulpits today. So, what exactly is the gospel? If distorting the gospel were not possible, Paul would not have said that his colleague communicators were not straightforward about the gospel. Here is what the apostle said:

“But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (Gal 2:14)

BY CYPRIAN ANTWI AWUAH



ARE YOU ALWAYS STRAIGHTFORWARD ABOUT THE GOSPEL?

Cyprian is the founder and director of Bold Grace Bible Institute – Ghana, an affiliate Bible School of Bold Grace Ministries, USA. Bold Grace is offering affordable six-month Bible training for pastors, Bible Students and Christians who love the Savior and desire to be trained in the correct way of interpreting the Bible. There is always a correct way of doing things in life and the Bible is no exception.

Bold Grace Bible Institute follows proper hermeneutics by using the literal, grammatical, historical, cultural and contextual interpretation of the Bible to train their students. This method creates a better framework which makes it easy for students to learn, understand and correctly interpret the intent of the original author.

So the question is this: Do you preach the gospel? oh wait a minute—let me ask this first: do you understand the content of the gospel? Now you say, “What is that?” By content, I mean the breakdown of the exact message that one needs to believe in order to be saved. Of course, there are many different truths in the Bible, but there’s only one message that can justify the sinner and save him from the lake of fire. That specific one is this: “Jesus Christ died for your sins, He was buried. He rose up on the third day.”

These few words are what we call, “content of the gospel.” It is the message that saves once you believe in it or rely on it. One benefit of believing in Christ is to receive eternal life which God has promised to those who believe in His Son.

There is an extraordinary power that God has put in the content to save everyone who believes. The Bible did not mince words:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek” (Rom 1:16)

**THERE'S ONLY
ONE MESSAGE
THAT CAN
JUSTIFY THE
SINNER**

But you see, not only do many distort or fail to be straightforward about the gospel, but they are also not straightforward about the truth that is associated with the gospel. The gospel comes with other truths like the gift of eternal life; the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; our instant, non-repeatable, irreversible, once-and-for-all spiritual birth, and all the truth which is designed for daily spirituality.

There are those who are not straightforward about these truths, too. For some teach that you can still have eternal life but be cut off from God. Wow! Have eternal life but still be cut off from God? This cannot be! This is because eternal life is eternal life—it is a life that is given forever. Praise God! God, thank you for blessing me with eternal life because of your only Son, Jesus Christ, and that because of Him, I will never perish.

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has been a blessing to you.*

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